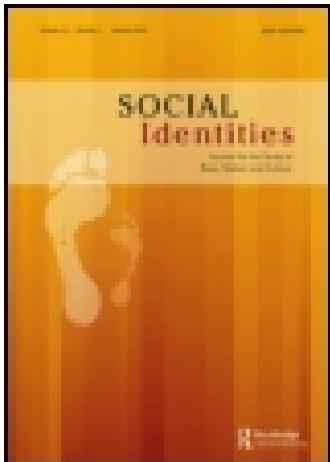


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## Demythifying the Witch's Identity as Social Critique in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*

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Women writers in the Caribbean have struggled against male nationalist and revolutionary cultural paradigms, as well as against dominant colonial European literary forms, in order to create new, more inclusive and differentiated accounts of Caribbean history, culture, and identity. While European writing has served to objectify and exoticise people of the Caribbean, social and cultural models developed by Caribbean male writers during the twentieth century have tended to exclude the experiences and suppress the voices of women writers.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to overarching theories such as *Négritude*, *Antillanité*, and *Créolité*,<sup>2</sup> women writers have used fictional texts as a medium for articulating experiences not explored before in Caribbean literature.

By appropriating and transforming European literary genres as well as male representations of women in literature, myth and history, Guadeloupean writers such as Maryse Condé, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra have created alternative theoretical paradigms of Caribbean women's subjectivities. In *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1986), Maryse Condé recreates the life of a seventeenth century Barbadian woman, reconstructing the figure of the witch in order to build a female Caribbean cultural and historical identity. Through her text, Condé redeems the witch figure in her historical context in order to confront problems within her own society. The novel functions as a way of dealing with and reclaiming an individual and national past: the history of African slavery and diaspora and the history of racism in white society across the Caribbean and America. Through a fictional re-visioning of an 'other' woman's life, Condé works through problems of her own history and identity.<sup>3</sup>

Condé acts as a feminist reader of the woman's life,<sup>4</sup> attempting to approach the subjectivity of a woman living under social conditions different from her own. Mixing factual documents, literary texts, and cultural myths, Condé constructs a subjectivity for Tituba, a black slave from Barbados taken to America and tried for being a witch. By expropriating Tituba from a white, male-narrated history and giving her a voice, Condé reclaims and redefines a specific version of Caribbean women's history in order to initiate her 'own cultural self-exploration, self-definition, and self-invention through and beyond the community's sociosymbolic system and contract' (Alarcón, 1994: 119).

With this text, Maryse Condé engages in a project of demythification and historical revision, rewriting the history of African slavery in America and the Caribbean to intervene in her present situation. Choosing a female character from a time and place removed from her own, she creates parallels between her contemporary society and the past society of her heroine. Condé connects the histories of Africa, the Caribbean and the United States in order to show the repetitions and continuities of racist, imperialist, masculinist structures in present-day Western culture.

Born in Guadeloupe, Maryse Condé has lived in Paris, Western Africa, and the United States. Engaged in Guadeloupean society through her political activity as well as her writing, Condé has been active in the country's cultural, social, and political arenas. A member of the Coalition for Guadeloupe's Freedom (Union pour la libération de la Guadeloupe), she supports independence for the French Overseas Departments in the Caribbean, and was a candidate for the regional council in 1992. In order to bring her work to the people of Guadeloupe, Condé became involved with a group of local artists, Plus Bakanal, whose performances link art directly to the community.

Condé is involved in an ongoing project of writing her own and Caribbean history. *I, Tituba* forms part of the writer's continuous struggle to understand individual and collective identities, to place the subject in history, and to link this history to other social and cultural histories. Condé's earlier novels — *Heremakhonon* (1976), *A Season in Rihata* (1981), *Segu* (1984), and *The Children of Segu* (1985) — explore the historical identity and relationship of Africa and the Caribbean. In later works such as *Tree of Life* (1987) and *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989), she confronts her land of origin, Guadeloupe. *I, Tituba*, published in 1986, marks a transition from historical writings set in Africa to more personal explorations of Caribbean identity. Along with her other novels, it forms part of a 'geographical movement [which] parallels Condé's emotional journey home to Guadeloupe' (Ann Armstrong-Scarboro, from the Afterword to *I, Tituba*), and works to demystify aspects of Caribbean history and culture.

In constructing a subjectivity for an individual woman who has been 'spoken for' or 'written out' of history, *I, Tituba* challenges dominant historical narratives while problematising its own representational practices. Condé questions her own literary project through her writing. Structurally and thematically, the text itself criticises the relationship of the writer to her subject as well as challenging the processes by which she constructs an identity for another woman.

In attempting to give voice to another woman, Condé employs strategies of collective narration and intertextual references to invert her authorial and authoritative position. She displaces her own subjectivity through implementation of a first-person narrative which allows the character Tituba to tell her own story. While this strategy functions to suspend the author's claims to omniscience and objectivity, the autobiographical voice of the character risks slipping into a false authenticity.<sup>5</sup>

Condé, however, calls attention to problems of literary and historical authentication and legitimisation through textual devices which question notions of an unbiased historical verity. While Tituba functions as a first-person narrator throughout her text, Condé disrupts the reader's sense of the truthfulness of her

testimony by including a mock epigraph at the beginning and an epilogue recited by Tituba after her death at the end of the novel. Employing the eighteenth-century male writing convention of authenticating one's authorial position with an epigraph, Condé subverts the legitimising effect of this literary technique. In her epigraph, Condé appoints herself chronicler of Tituba's life based on their intimate relationship: 'Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else'. By claiming to have lived with Tituba for a year, Condé calls attention to the fictivity of her narrative, while setting up a 'space' or 'moment' outside territorial and temporal boundaries in which these women, separated by three hundred years, can come together in a collective subjectivity that transforms conventional understandings of individual consciousness:

In this epigraph Condé and Tituba become a fictional collective narratorial voice ... At the same time, through this signed epigraph, Condé establishes the authority of Tituba's voice, which narrates the rest of the fictional autobiography in the first person, by destabilising Condé's own authorial position. (Manzor-Coates, 1993: 737)

Condé sets up a 'collective narratorial voice' through the mingling of her own and Tituba's subjectivities. The text incorporates actual testimony from the historical Tituba, factual information about slavery and the genocide of Native Americans, allusions to real historical figures (such as the Puritan, Cotton Mather), intertextual references to fictional literary characters such as Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter*, discourses of contemporary Western feminism, and references to the Jewish diaspora and the Holocaust. Tituba's history thus becomes part of the larger narrative of American slavery and white Christian male oppression. Marie-Denise Shelton describes the merging of social, political, and historical structures into Tituba's story:

Here the contemporary discourse on power, gender, and cultural politics is transposed in the fictional story of the forgotten black witch of Salem. In giving voice to the 'witch,' the author uncovers the complex interplay between subjectivity, the collective, and history. (1993: 720)

Her own misery as a slave in Boston coincides with mass enslavement of Africans and American and Caribbean Indians:

The slave trade was being intensified. Thousands of our people were being snatched from Africa. I learned that we were not the only ones the whites were reducing to slavery; they were also enslaving the Indians, the original inhabitants of both America and our beloved Barbados. (Condé, 1996: 46–77)

Condé interjects the history of the Jews into her text as yet another thread of the American and European history of oppression. Through the character of Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo,<sup>6</sup> a Jewish merchant who buys Tituba and ultimately grants her freedom, religious persecution of witches acquires a larger context of systemic intolerance and oppression. *I, Tituba* becomes then a dialogue between one woman's subjectivity and the social, economic, and political systems through

which this subjectivity is constituted. In such a context of multiple oppressions, Tituba forms relational alliances with other marginalised people — slaves, women, and Jews — through which the text points out connections between experiences of different oppressed groups.

In reconstructing the persona of Tituba, Condé intervenes in traditional discourses about the historical and mythical figure of the 'witch' and the 'seer.' Her text describes the myths surrounding Tituba in order to challenge prevailing cultural attitudes and revise dominant beliefs about women labelled as witches. *I, Tituba* reveals the cultural construction of the 'witch' identity, demonstrating how its meaning changes according to different contexts.

Feared and despised for her powers, Tituba criticises her reception within the various communities she serves. After living as a recluse on the edge of a plantation in Barbados, Tituba encounters the plantation slaves, whose fear at her approach dismays her:

The terror of these people seemed like an injustice to me. They should have greeted me with shouts of joy and welcome and presented me with a list of illnesses that I would have tried my utmost to cure. I was born to heal, not to frighten. (p. 12)

As Tituba struggles with her problematic relationship to her society, the text challenges ideas of fixed identity and of objective, complete knowledge.

Condé makes explicit the themes of partial knowledge and contradictory emotions in the context of Tituba's quest for higher knowledge and increased magic powers. Feeling that she commanded the elements on the sea passage from America to Barbados, Tituba attempts to surpass the powers of her spiritual teacher, Mama Yaya. The obeah women and men she seeks out for greater knowledge, however, mistrust Tituba and refuse to share their secrets with her. In this other culture, Tituba encounters spheres of knowledge she cannot enter, which are 'other' to her own experience.

Accepting the limits of objectivity and recognising all knowledge as partial, Condé validates ways of seeing and knowing which have been excluded or spurned by dominant rationalist discourses. Tituba reinterprets her own psychic powers as positive, life-affirming qualities, indicting societies which vilify the witch figure and implicating contemporary Western models of thought in her critique. She points out that 'the witch' is a social construct, created to disparage and contain women's powers of healing, of communicating with the unseen world. Tituba herself asks the New England girls who later accuse her of being a witch, 'Do you know what a witch really is?' (p. 61), in order to question their assumptions as well as challenge the reader's conceptions.

In pointing out the unstable meaning of the term 'witch' and maintaining that Tituba's view is only one voice among many, Condé indicates the partiality of her own text. When the leader of the Maroon band, Christopher, asks her whether she is a witch, Tituba responds, 'Everyone gives that word a different meaning. Everyone believes he can fashion a witch to his way of thinking so that she will satisfy his ambitions, dreams, and desires' (p. 146). Here, the text reflects upon its own constructedness, criticising its own project of telling

Tituba's life story in a way that satisfies her author's 'ambitions, dreams, and desires'.

The attitude that 'the witch (if that's what the person who has this gift is to be called)' should be 'cherished and revered rather than feared' (p. 17) echoes throughout the novel. In the New England forests, Tituba meets a friend of Mama Yaya's, the Boston witch Judah White, who continues Tituba's instruction in herbal remedies while theorising about the historical meanings given to witches:

Men hate us and yet without us their lives would be sad and narrow.  
Thanks to us they can change the present and sometimes read the future.  
Thanks to us they can hope. Tituba, we are the salt of the earth. (p. 52)

The text humanises the witch figure as it exposes the ways in which dominant discourses construct and manipulate the epithet of 'witch' to dominate and contain individuals and groups who are different from and defiant of the social order.

In addition to rehabilitating the aspects of the 'witch' as positive, productive social and psychological elements, Condé invokes the witch figure in order to problematise conventional identity paradigms. Tituba herself deconstructs notions of fixed and unitary subjectivity as she confronts the contradictions and ambivalence in her own desires, beliefs and actions. The witch figure functions not only to elucidate contradictions within individual subjectivity, but also to point out racism and sexism in western ideologies.

In *I, Tituba*, Condé distinguishes between men's and women's perspectives on the idea that war and violence constitute the price of freedom. Tituba reiterates Mama Yaya's concerns about killing and destruction as she resists the brutality of Iphigene's plan to murder the women and children of the plantation. She sees in the slaves' revolt a pattern of violence that echoes the whites' genocidal behaviour towards the blacks in Barbados, a pattern she rejects: 'I lowered my head farther and murmured: 'do we have to become like them?'" (p. 162). Iphigene counters her concerns, opposing her pacifist methods to the male world of action: 'The future belongs to those who know how to shape it and, believe me, you won't get anywhere with incantations and animal sacrifices. Only through actions' (p. 164). He effectively silences her, and she realises that the violence of past revolts and bloodbaths will continue.

*I, Tituba* portrays the culture of violence which characterises western history in terms of a male-female split. The text presents colonisation and slavery as 'men's business', while women strive to find alternative models of human relations. In her dream the night before the revolt, Tituba makes clear the connection between patriarchy and violence. In this dream, Samuel Parris, John Indian, and Christopher unite to rape her. Condé associates these three men across racial, political, religious, and class boundaries, as representatives of a male, patriarchal order that structures a culture of oppression by eliminating the 'female' principles of compassion and empathy.

Condé also differentiates between the significance of the witch in black and white society. For the whites in the text, black skin signifies evil, and the correlation of blacks with Satan constitutes part of a general discourse of racism.

Condé suggests the racism inherent in Puritan notions of 'witch' with John Indian's fearful warning to Tituba:

Governor Dutton had two slaves who had been accused of dealing with Satan burned in the square at Bridgetown. For the whites that's what being a witch means ... ! (p. 27)

This description indicates the racism inherent in the white New Englanders' notion of 'witch'. Condé implies that, in the eyes of white Puritan society, any black woman (or possibly man) could be justifiably murdered as a witch. She also exposes the hypocrisy of Puritan society in their continuous supplications to Tituba to use her powers for their benefit, meanwhile condemning her for these same powers.

To emphasise the racist nature of western thought, Condé contrasts the Puritans' negative attitude towards witches with their acceptance in the Afro-Caribbean culture of Barbados. *I, Tituba* displays 'the disjuncture between the slaves' belief in a positive kind of sorcery and the Europeans' belief that all sorcery was the work of the devil' (Manzor-Coates, 1993: 739–40). After her return from the American Colonies, Tituba gains a reputation for healing the sick and wounded, and slaves come to her from all over the island to benefit from her knowledge of plants.

In denouncing white society's concept of witches as anti-black and anti-female, Condé also demystifies the witch figure and her powers. Mama Yaya explains to Tituba that she cannot make Christopher, the leader of the maroons, invincible, and Tituba herself disabuses the maroon women of their illusions about her magic abilities. Condé contrasts the exaggerated visions of others with Tituba's actual life as a witch. Welcomed home by the plantation slaves, Tituba goes about her everyday life, practising her art: 'My working day was very simple. I got up at dawn, prayed, went down to bathe in the River Ormond, had a bite to eat, then spent my time on my explorations and healing' (p. 156). In an ironic tone of understatement, Tituba goes on to describe how she discovered cures for cholera and smallpox, how to

mend open, festering wounds, to put pieces of bone back together again, and to tie up limbs. All that, of course, with the help of my invisible spirits, who hardly ever left me. I had given up the illusion of making men invincible and immortal. I accepted the limits of the species. (p. 156)

While her activities appear fantastic, the novel ties them into the material reality of plantation life in Barbados.

The end of Tituba's story links Western civilisation's treatment of witches to its history of racist oppression. Condé relates Tituba's death with the lynchings of blacks throughout American history. The Barbadian planters line up all slaves suspected of revolt under a silk-cotton tree and then hang them. Tituba's last words before her death recall the lynchings of black men in the American South: 'I was the last to be taken to the gallows. All around me strange trees were bristling with strange fruit' (p. 172). In closing her narration with an allusion to Billie Holiday's song, 'Strange Fruit', Condé brings Tituba's story into contemporary American culture. The incongruity of this combination of a

modern American Blues singer with a seventeenth-century Barbadian slave unsettles the narrative while providing a continuity of oppression and resistance across time and space. By moving Tituba's story into current cultural relations, Condé obliges the reader to position herself within the material and ideological relations her text creates.

In opposing the divergent belief systems of the Barbados slaves and the Euro-American Puritan community, Condé connects Tituba and the islands to the Jewish culture of Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo, a merchant who buys Tituba and eventually grants her freedom. In response to the barbarism of the Puritans who set fire to his house and murder his children, Benjamin looks to spiritual and moral justifications (p. 133). He joins with Tituba in discussing the histories of their respective peoples and allows her to act as a medium so that he can speak with his dead wife (p. 125). Tied to Tituba through shared oppression, Benjamin accepts her magic, her status as witch, in the face of his own religion (p. 131). Condé thus connects both the histories and the belief systems of the Jewish and African diasporic communities in order to criticise dominant white Christian structures of thought. By complicating Tituba's subjectivity, Maryse Condé breaks down dichotomies of complicity and resistance, replacing these binaries with the notion of a multiple, conflicted subject.

Through her text, Condé attempts 'to re-examine and rewrite the history of slavery and colonialism from oppositional locations' (Mohanty, 1991: 11). The oppositional locations set up by Condé are complex and conflicted. Tituba criticises the political, ideological, and social structures that comprise her world while acknowledging her own ambivalent position within these structures.

*I, Tituba* also problematises notions of subjectivity and of agency within the context of resistance to systems of domination and oppression. The character of Tituba struggles with herself and her society in an attempt to resist conforming to oppressive, unjust social orders. She negotiates her own survival under hostile conditions while fighting for a larger liberation for all humanity. Tituba's development as a speaking and acting subject is marked by ambivalence and contradiction. At one point, Tituba gives in to the pressures of torture and intimidation, conforming to the dictates and standards set by the oppressive regime that controls her communities. Ultimately, however, she stands up for her own convictions, deciding her fate through her choices and actions.

Condé thematises the conflict between resistance and complicity through the ambivalence of Tituba's desire. Throughout the narration, Tituba struggles with her passion for John Indian and her aspirations for independence and her own power. Condé shows Tituba 'choosing' slavery in order to be with John Indian, relinquishing her freedom for love. For Tituba, the decision to submit to slavery is problematic. She questions her own actions, recognising their ambivalence. She reflects that, despite her mother having been raped and hanged and her adoptive father having committed suicide because of a white man, she

was considering living among white men again, in their midst, under their domination. And all because of an uncontrollable desire for a mortal man. Wasn't it madness? Madness and betrayal? (p. 19)

Tituba's ambivalence manifests itself further in her attitude towards her magic powers and her struggle to use her gifts to bring about positive change in an unjust world. She acknowledges the split within herself on questions of revenge and of conforming to the inhumanity of her society. Her own thoughts are echoed in a black servant woman's words, which she nevertheless disputes; to Sarah's admonition that, 'knowledge must adapt itself to society' (p. 68), Tituba responds, 'Oh no, they won't get me to be the same as they are! I will not give in' (p. 69). She problematises her own position, realising that the meaning of all actions depend on the context in which they are performed:

How na•ve I had been to think that proclaiming one's innocence would suffice to prove it. How naive I had been not to know that to do good to the evil and weak is the same as doing evil? (p. 93)

Condé emphasises the problem of opposing systems of domination without becoming like them. In *I, Tituba*, this problem surfaces in themes of revenge and ambition. Repeatedly exploited and tormented because of her race and her gender, Tituba struggles against using her magic in retaliation for these wrongs. When Tituba attempts to protect herself from Susanna Endicott's connivances, Mama Yaya advises Tituba against using her powers for revenge,

You will have perverted your heart into the bargain. You will have become like them, knowing only how to kill and destroy. (p. 30)

In *I, Tituba*, Condé shows the damaging influence of systematic, institutionalised oppression on individuals. Tituba recognises how the fighting and betrayal within the white Puritan community affect her own attitudes and perspectives. As one citizen after another pleads with her to wreak vengeance on their enemies, Tituba laments,

It was the putrid smell of all these crimes seeking to be committed that turned me into another woman ... Yes, I was becoming another woman. A stranger to myself. (p. 66)

A physical transformation indicates Tituba's conflicted mental state. Unable to eat or drink, she begins wandering through the forest to tire her body out so that she can sleep. Consumed by thoughts of revenge, she neglects her health and her appearance:

Awesome and hideous. My uncombed hair formed a mane around my head. My cheeks became hollow and my mouth pouted brazenly, stretched to the limits over my swollen gums. (p. 66)

Tituba's preoccupation with retribution against the white, Puritan society of the American Colonies merges with a desire to return to her homeland and to learn the secrets which the ghosts of Mama Yaya and her mother Abena had withheld from her. Once back in Barbados, she attempts to surpass Mama Yaya's abilities in a quest for knowledge and power. Her ambition forms part of an ambivalence towards power with which Tituba struggles throughout the book as she vacillates between pride and humility, protest and acquiescence.

Tituba both resists and succumbs to Samuel Parris' demands that she confess to being a witch and denounce others as her accomplices. She endures the Puritan men's rape and beating, refusing to betray herself and others, but later in court partially complies with their will, confessing to crimes she did not commit and accusing others as well. Through Tituba's contradictory actions, Condé problematises the notion of resistance. John Indian complicates Tituba's belief in honesty and integrity by elucidating the larger political context:

Wife, my tortured wife! Once again you're making a mistake about what matters most. The important thing is to stay alive. If they ask you to denounce the others, denounce them! This world is not ours and if they want to set it on fire, our job is to stay away from the flames. Denounce anybody they tell you to! (p. 92)

Not only does John Indian bring up the relativity of resistance strategies, but he explains the way in which meanings change depending on the perspective of those in control of defining and interpreting. To Tituba's declaration that she is not guilty, he replies:

Guilty? Oh, yes, you are and you always will be in their eyes. The important thing is to keep yourself alive for yourself, for me ... and for our unborn children! ... And by pretending to obey them, avenge yourself and me as well. (p. 92)

Through the opposing views of Tituba and John Indian, the novel points out how vengeance and survival work both as a strategy of liberation and as a barrier to collective opposition to oppression.

Faced with the maroon rebellion and the final slave revolt, Tituba again ponders questions about personal survival and collective resistance. Tituba has finally obtained her freedom from slavery when the maroon fighter Deodatus asks her, 'What will your freedom mean if your own people are in bondage?' (p. 138). To his challenge to fight with them against the white society which rules Barbados, Tituba responds equivocally:

Despite all I had just been through and this unfulfilled lust for revenge inside me, I hadn't the heart to get involved with maroons and to risk my life for them. Paradoxically, I realised that all I wanted was to live in peace on my island regained. (p. 144)

Her ambivalence here points out the complexity and the interdependence of personal and social struggle. Later, the text reveals that the maroons themselves occupy an ambiguous position with relation to the black slave community, colluding with white authorities in order to keep their own freedom. By exposing the contradictions of the maroon rebellion and slave revolt, *I, Tituba* challenges the notion of 'pure' liberation strategies.

*I, Tituba* reappropriates a historical woman from mythical and literary tradition by writing her a life and a subjectivity. This figure emerges as an acting historical subject who criticises her own society as well as challenging larger western historical and cultural traditions. In constructing a narrative for Tituba, the text addresses moral and political questions for contemporary society

concerning individual survival and social liberation, complicity and resistance, and the ways in which differences in race, class, and gender enter into these configurations.

Along with her critique of existing social systems, Condé explores new forms of communicating and develops new paradigms for relationships. In *I, Tituba*, the spirits of the dead operate as utopian moments in the narrative, as they provide a network of support for the living. The connection between Tituba and the ghosts of her mother, Yao, and Mama Yaya offers a vision of community beyond the hierarchically structured relationships of existing society. Sustained by these spirits, Tituba creates a space of connection and healing within the vicious Puritan environment of Salem. Embodied in various characters — her mother Abena, Yao, Mama Yaya, Hester Prynne, Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo — the voices of multiple groups combine in the text to show the interconnectedness of different oppressions and to point out the need for a more inclusive vision of political struggle. Tituba's own utopian vision emerges on the journey from the American Colonies back to Barbados:

I began to imagine another course for life, another meaning, another motive. The fire engulfs the top of the tree. The Rebel has disappeared in a cloud of smoke. He has triumphed over death and his spirit remains. The frightened circle of slaves regains its courage. The spirit remains. (p. 136)

Rather than translating this image into a specific set of practices, Tituba presents the reader with an imperative and a challenge: 'Life had to be given a new meaning. But how?'. Condé refuses to answer this question for the reader; instead, she offers an epilogue which describes a utopian death for Tituba that contrasts with the ambivalence of her life. Condé writes Tituba an afterlife in which she becomes the spirit of revolt for all slaves, and it is in the discrepancy between her actual life and imagined death that Tituba becomes a symbol of social change for the present and future:

By 'finding' Tituba's story ... Condé rehabilitates while giving voice to a historical figure. Ultimately, Condé diffuses this reaffirmation of Tituba's individuality into a positive and collective voice of resistance and strength from which any of her spiritual descendants can take inspiration. (Spear, 1993: 728)

*I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* recuperates a historical-mythical woman for the project of revisioning the past in order to envision a different future. In its challenge to dominant accounts of history, myth, and literature as well as its critique of Western civilisation, this text implicates contemporary society and so reveals the need for social change. The text itself becomes part of this social transformation by creating new forms of subjectivity and community as alternatives to a legacy of domination based on binary models. Through her fictional re-visioning of a historical woman's story, *I, Tituba* engages readers in a process of critical questioning which opens up the potential for imagining alternative personal and social realities.

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## Notes

1. Introducing their collection of short stories by Caribbean Women, *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam*, Carmen C. Esteves and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert explain that, until the mid-1960s, Caribbean literary tradition's

concern with the creation of a body of literature that articulated autochthonous interpretations of history and developing definitions of national identity led to the neglect and devaluation of women's writing, as the themes acceptable within the context of national formation — political development, agricultural reform, breaking the race barriers to education and the professions — often fell outside the boundaries of women's socio-historic experiences (p. xvi).

Susheila Nasta further describes how colonial patriarchal myths and symbols were 'perpetuated in the works of male writers who created stereotypes of woman' (p. xiii). Nasta writes that, 'The post-colonial woman writer is not only involved in making herself heard, in changing the architecture of male-centred ideologies and languages, or in discovering new forms and language to express her experience, she has also to subvert and demythologise indigenous male writings and traditions which seek to label her' (p. xv). In an interview for the volume *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, the Cuban writer Nancy Morejohn points out that 'in our tradition we have had the male view of the Caribbean' (1990: 266).

2. Throughout the twentieth century, male Caribbean writers of fiction have been simultaneously engaged in creating political theories and cultural movements against colonialist projects of assimilation and deculturation. Three primary examples are Aimé Césaire's poetry and political involvement with *Négritude* in the 1930s and 1940s, Edouard Glissant's concept of *Antillanité* formulated in 1957–58, and the political poetics of *Créolité* advocated by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant (Antoine, 1992: 359). See also Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido's preface to *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*:

In the Caribbean ... writers like Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Aime Cesaire, George Lamming, and Martin Carter have given voice to a political/social movement for change and creative growth through their art (1990: xi).

3. In 'Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism', Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes,

The very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicised consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It

becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself (1991: 34).

4. Patrocinio Schweickart offers a feminist reader-reception approach as an alternative to traditional male models of reading, whereby the woman reader enters into a dialogue with the subjectivity of the woman writer through the text. Schweickart's model emphasises the dialogic nature of the relationship between the feminist reader and the woman writer. Such an interchange exists not only in the reader's confrontation with the woman-authored text, but is also developed by the woman writer who re-visions and re-creates the lives of women within her own texts. According to Schweickart, the feminist story of reading is a three-part process: first, 'the feminist reader speaks as a witness in defence of the woman writer'; second, the feminist reader must 'visit the poet on her own *premises*', that is, she must look at the literary work within the social, historic, and cultural contexts within which it was written; and third, the feminist reader construes the text 'not as an object, but as the manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author — the 'voice' of another woman' — and tries to connect with this subjectivity through the text. In approaching the author, the feminist reader acknowledges her own cultural and temporal limitations with respect to the text so as not to appropriate this other subjectivity (see Schweickart, 1986).
5. I both support and dispute the arguments Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi makes in her article, 'Giving Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?' Mudimbé-Boyi writes that

Condé's strategy of subversion leads to the empowerment of a voiceless Tituba and gives her the authorial position in the narrative ... In withdrawing to the unauthorial position of an interpreter or mediator, Condé ensures the authenticity of the character's voice' (752–53).

I see Condé's writing process as questioning not only her own authorial position, but also the authenticity of her own and other narrative voices. By having Tituba critique her future biographers — 'There would never, ever, be a careful, sensitive biography recreating my life and its suffering' (p. 110) — the novel challenges its own legitimacy and genuineness, and by extension, that of other biographies, autobiographies, and testimonials. Thus, Condé's project is even more subversive and deconstructive than argued by Mudimbé-Boyi.

6. While Condé portrays Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo sympathetically in contrast to the New England Puritans, I find her characterisation problematic in its unconscious feminisation of and perpetuation of stereotyping the Jewish male as physically deformed, 'crooked' and 'misshapen' (1992: 120, 127, 140).

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